CONTENT WARNINGS

*Attempted homicide

*Isolation

*Plane crash

*Heights

[Theme music: “Some Spooky Sh*t Is Going On Here” by Theo Goodwin]

INTRO

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The Underwood Collection, Episode 20: Homecoming

[Theme ends.]

[Tape recorder clicks on. Static is heard throughout.]

ULYSSES
Okay. It's noon on the dot. I got Morgan to cover for me and say that I'm getting lunch, which is true on…some level. I'm recording myself just in case, but I promise that this won't be a tape of me eating a quesadilla; that's disgusting.

I'm looking for Frank, following the guidelines he left in the Morse code note. I don't know when or if I'm going to find him— I don't know *what* I'm expecting, honestly.

But I'm on my way to the obelisk, staying as visible as possible, and hoping for the best.

[Tape recorder clicks off, then back on.]

ULYSSES
It's 12:05. I'm at the obelisk now, just…walking around the path, trying not to attract the attention of tourists, which…isn't working. Well, Frank was right about one thing, and it's that this place is as public as possible. I'm just—

TOURIST
Excuse me, sir? Do you know how to get to the National Mall from here?

ULYSSES
[Annoyed] This *is* the National Mall. I'd recommend getting a map, there's a place to grab free ones right over there. Perfect.

TOURIST (Simult.)
Oh. Oh, alright, thanks— uh, bye.

[footsteps]

ULYSSES
[sighing] Frank, the things I put up with for you.

[Tape recorder clicks off, then back on.]

ULYSSES
It's 12:15. Still nothing. I've found a bench. Quesadilla's pretty good.

[Tape recorder clicks off, then back on.]

ULYSSES
12:22. I figured I would just wait until twelve thirty but then I got bored. Honestly, the more I wait, the more I'm just—confused. I *know* that was Frank's handwriting. I know the note said to come here on today's date, at this time, and yet—nothing. Feels stupid to have held out this much hope on scraps.

Well. At least I had a nice lunch.

[Tape recorder clicks off, then back on.]

ULYSSES
It's now 12:31, which speaks wonders to my self control. You know, maybe this is all part of some secret plot from Adriene to murder me, which I've simply thought I was avoiding by diving into this whole *other* disaster, and you know? At this point, I would not be surprised. Life is already—

FRANK
[basically out of nowhere] Careful, now! You're starting to sound like me.

ULYSSES
I— [Stunned and irritated] Mother*fucker,* you're *late.*

FRANK
Can't ever be too cautious.

ULYSSES
I've been here since noon!

FRANK

Yes, it looked like you were having quite the peaceful lunch. I wouldn't have wanted to interrupt.

ULYSSES
[at first mock angry:] I *cannot* believe you. You've—You've just let me get harassed by tourists, and—and wait around like a paranoid fool who's got - [growing genuinely hurt] - no idea what's going on, following random scraps of information under the blind assumption that *you* were going to come through for me—

FRANK
It wasn't a blind assumption. You trusted your gut, made the call, did the follow-up. I was late because I had to make sure it was you sitting here, and not some twisted trick of the light—*well,* the Dark, strictly speaking, but you catch my drift. I was always going to come.

ULYSSES
I—I'm sorry. *[Beat.]* It's been a rough week. Month.

FRANK
Year?

ULYSSES
That too. It's—been a lot since you've been gone. I mean—I mean, I don't even know *what's* been going on, except that the more I figure out the less sense everything seems to make. And that's just on the front of everything that happened to *you,* not even considering the fact that ants are apparently becoming a major factor in my life for the *second* time, which—

FRANK
Alright, alright, alright. One thing at a time. Come here.

[They hug.]

It's good to see you again, kid.

ULYSSES
I'll have you know I'm 35.

FRANK
Oh, happy birthday!

ULYSSES
Thanks.

FRANK
So. Greetings out of the way, what do you want to know?

ULYSSES
Mostly just…What the hell happened?

FRANK
Oh, Adriene tried to kill me.

ULYSSES
Well,yeah, I *figured.*

FRANK
So you know about her… arrangement, then. With the Dark.

ULYSSES
The thing in the mirrors gave me her daughter's statement.

FRANK
Ah! And how are they?

ULYSSES
Adriene's daughter?

FRANK
No, the Mirrors. They were always very good to me when I was in your position. A bit mischievous, but much more trustworthy than Adriene ever was. Though I suppose that wasn't a high bar.

ULYSSES
Uh… good? I don't really know how to read the emotional state of the personification of a reflection, but it didn't seem… bad.

FRANK
Good, good. Adriene doesn't control the Mirrors, so I asked them to keep quite a few statements and notes safe for me. Towards the end, I… recognised that simply hiding the statements wouldn't keep Adriene away from my dissent, so I recommended a few be dropped off for you when I was inevitably removed.

ULYSSES
You knew?

FRANK
I was fairly certain. Adriene had plans I disagreed with. She acted as if running the Foundation was a war to be won, and maybe it was, to her. But I disallowed her treatment of the Entities and their avatars, and she decided that it meant I did not have the nerve.

ULYSSES
Her treatment of avatars—what plans, Frank?

FRANK
Not here. And not on tape.

ULYSSES
Right.

FRANK
The point is that I refused, and Adriene got… chilly. I thought it would be temporary until you showed up, and she started giving you statements right away. Probably testing how you could handle it. And when you *could,* I knew I didn't have much time. It was pragmatic to her, I think. A much more permanent way of laying me off.

ULYSSES
Frank, I'm so sorry.

FRANK
Don't be. You did everything right. You're here, aren't you?

ULYSSES

I guess.

FRANK
Here. You've got that recorder running, haven't you?

ULYSSES
Yeah. I figured if this was actually Adriene trying to kill me I'd better get it on tape.

FRANK
[amused] Always useful.

ULYSSES
Why do you ask?

FRANK
I'm going to give a statement. If there's any last thing I can do, it's this. The Dark doesn't like to be recorded.

ULYSSES
Spiting Adriene post-mortem? Or, post-should-have-been-mortem, anyway?

FRANK
Just doing my part. Whenever you're ready, Ulysses.

ULYSSES
Okay. Statement of Dr. Franklin Prosper, regarding…?

FRANK
An escape.

ULYSSES
Right. Statement recorded live from subject, 18 March, 2017. Statement begins.

FRANK [STATEMENT]

Right. The last thing I remembered before all hell broke loose was walking into Adriene's office to hand in my resignation. Better to go out on my own

terms, I thought. I planned to hand it in, speak to her, and face whatever consequences came to me. I barely got through the door before the world went black.

What felt like moments later, I woke up from whatever sort of… trance Adriene had put me in, completely disoriented, sitting in a small plane, right by the window, with a woman and her child settling into the two seats beside me. I should have rushed out then, but I couldn't get my bearings until we were already lifting off the ground, and I was stuck.

I tried not to panic, searching around the cabin for some sign of where I was. Asked around a bit—questioning my neighbors and a few confused flight attendants—which got me more than a few strange looks, but eventually it seemed we had only just left DC, and I wondered if maybe this was—this was just Adriene getting rid of me, letting me *go.*

It wasn't, of course, we both knew that. It didn't matter much, however. I would have been stuck there anyway. Until we landed, I wasn't going anywhere, a thousand feet in the sky and rising. There was nothing for me to do but wait, and so I turned to the window, and waited, heart pounding in my chest.

It was a foggy night. Not the kind of night you wanted to be flying in. Crash risk goes up, you can't see five feet in front of you, and… It's just such a disorienting feeling, you know, taking off in the fog at night. You can hardly tell which way's up, and you barely even feel like you're moving. This fog, in particular, felt more solid, like you could practically reach out and touch it. Naturally, I was on edge, but there was nothing I could do at that point, so I sat, and I stared out the window with dread in the pit of my stomach, as we were swallowed by the night sky.

It was lonely enough without the Fear behind it, but this reminded me too much of everything before, of everything I'd wanted to leave behind. I'd seen the lost look on enough faces as the pressure rose in our ears that I knew that no matter how many of us were on the plane, we may soon be beyond connection.

We headed up, up, up into the clouds, past layers and layers of the mist, just… *ascending,* for what felt like forever. The clouds never ended.

There was nothing I could do— we were already in the air. I had to distract myself from the panic, somehow, as it threatened to suffocate me, so I focused as much as I could on the sky outside, taking deep breaths and trying to clear my mind.

I still found my thoughts drifting, though, moving to whatever the hell I was doing on this damn plane. I'd wanted to get out of there for… God, for so long, and I hoped against hope this was leaving for good. I think deep down I could tell I wasn't going to get through that flight without incident; Adriene wasn't letting me go without a fight, and the tension in the air felt palpable. It wasn't just a random blackout, and this wasn't just my ticket out of here. This was her plan.

I continued to stare though, breathing deeply and trying not to let the fear sink in. The fog around us was getting heavier and heavier, not letting up even as we lifted. At some point I decided it must have turned to clouds, but everything just looked the same.

The ground might have only been a few meters away, or a few miles, but everything was so dark it didn't matter. In my mind, we were flying a million miles over the Atlantic, not a speck of land in sight, just soaring, soaring, through open air. Of course, I could tell from the movement of the plane—and the swooping in my stomach—which way we were headed; but sometimes, for a moment, the plane moved downwards a little too quickly, and the outside didn't seem to move… And for a second, it was like we were floating, alone, in the sky.

The fog continued to get thicker and thicker, the warmth of the cabin lowering just *slightly,* enough for people to start shivering, but never low enough that anyone but me had yet noticed that something was wrong.

It was as I searched around for an explanation to the dropping temperatures that the fog began to seep in. I could tell almost immediately, even without looking, from the sudden ice cold climate, that it had happened.

The people around me seemed to be growing more and more concerned, putting any coats or jumpers they had with them back on, and angrily questioning whatever poor flight attendant would listen. None of them, however, seemed to notice the slowly creeping mist.

The cold had started to numb the feeling in my toes. No one else seemed to notice the mist, and the numbness was beginning to spread.

It was the recognizable numbness of the Lonely, and the fog was filling the space faster than it seemed it should have when I looked at it in any close way.

Soon after, those *things* showed up.

I hadn't taken my eyes off the window since the fog started seeping in, the mumbling of the passengers around me, the soft conversation of the mother and child to my right, all slowly drowned out by the pounding of my heart and the deep, laser sharp focus on the world outside, praying that we'd breach the fog, that I could see the sun and relax back into my seat, that I could escape.

That moment never came, of course. Instead, I slowly started to notice shadows in the clouds. Large shadows. Big, slow lumbering shadows. I almost screamed when I caught my first glimpse of the creatures casting those shadows. Huge, skeletal things, somehow moving through the open air like walking, slowly beginning to take notice of our plane passing through, and moving towards it, opening their mouths to cry out--and the only thing I could see was this creature, so vast and incomprehensible, and it seemed to be the sky, and it seemed to be smiling, and I felt already swallowed. Swallowed by the infinite, open sky around me, its mouth, the sky had opened its teeth for us, and we—foolish and mortal and so naive to the insignificance of our own existence—we flew right in.

And I did scream, in that moment, I screamed until my lungs felt like they would burst, and all around me the sky swallowed that sound whole, my tiny, pitiful scream lost, lost in its vastness and its uncaring, and I was so small, and I was *alone*.

I screamed until my throat was sore, and still no one around me noticed. The fog wrapped around me, muffling it, and dimming the cabin around me.

The thing to finally pull me out of that trance was the sound of another's cry and the shattering of glass.

Someone right behind me was screaming, and I spun around to see what the problem was. One of the windows—two seats down from where I'd been sitting the whole flight—was smashed, and the three seats beside it were empty... Another window smashed. Then another. All around me there were screaming and panicked passengers. The people who'd been sitting in those seats just moments before had been snatched from their seats by large, bony hands, and tossed out, disappearing into the dark sky below us.

This was calculated. This was meant to get me out of the way; I knew it as much as I hated it. Adriene and Callum worked this way— always pushing a little bit too long, always trying to hurt one person and then revelling in the collateral. I knew I was the intended target of this hell, though whether it was meant to kill or merely incapacitate me I still can't say. All the same, there were people here at the mercy of forces they didn't understand, going down alongside me for the amusement of a man who would rather sink alone than swim with any help and the satisfaction of a woman unseen.

The passenger beside me had started to sob, holding her child tightly as the fog drifted around the plane and the long, thin, pale hands of whatever *creatures* had broken through the windows around us snatched our fellow passengers and pulling them out into the deep, vast, unending sky.

I was half out of my seat by this point—the air around me freezing, and the oxygen masks beginning to drop—and though the shock froze me for a moment, I quickly came back to my senses, and dropped to the ground.

The people around me were being torn from their seats faster than they could scream, a combination of the rapidly dropping cabin pressure and the greedy hands of bony figures pulling them out the window and off into the yawning maw of the cloudy sky. I could barely see through the thick fog around me, but the shadows of the creatures slowly moving through the plane were large enough to make out as I crawled towards the front of the plane. They were hunting, and I knew in my bones that they were hunting for me.

As I moved across the floor, I could hear the passengers screaming around me, grabbing at the people and objects around them, trying to escape their inevitable fate.

Cold hands—maybe those of fellow passengers, maybe not—grabbed at me as I crawled, all of them pulling me backwards, through the windows, out,

out into the open sky. I didn't even know what I was crawling to, just that if I kept moving the creatures that had begun to fully roam through into the cabin couldn't take me, couldn't find me in the fog and swallow me whole, lost to the sky forever.

I looked around frantically to attempt any sort of analysis of the situation, and finally I saw the shapes of the creatures that had been attacking us fully. I don’t know how they fit in the plane—so incomprehensibly large they were—but somehow they did, and the effect was horrifying, stretching out the cabin so it felt as though the roof was a thousand miles away, and the length was fully untraversable.

And I realized. I was floating in the open sky, surrounded by both Vast and Lonely, surrounded by the choking feeling of inevitability. This Fear could only be prolonged for so long before it found me and finished me off for good. There were no two ways about it. I was trapped. We were all trapped. And so I made a reckless, last ditch decision.

By this point, the creatures that had crashed into our plane had crashed through most of the windows. They were crawling all over the plane, and at some point, had destroyed the door between the cabin and the cockpit. And so that’s where I headed.

Crawling there was difficult, with all the hands grabbing at me, the screaming passengers all around, and the sudden increasing of the space inside this small plane but the creatures were distracted, and I made it.

I’m sure you could figure out that I’ve never flown a plane before, so most of the controls were completely unfamiliar to me, but we had already started to dip, and I had nothing to lose. All I knew was that I couldn’t let her win. She wasn’t going to take my life without a fight, or the lives of anyone on that plane. I was furious, and running almost entirely on adrenaline. It seemed like the only thing to do.

I started hitting buttons, flipping switches, anything I could do to mess with the trajectory of this plane. Almost immediately, we began to fall.

The rapid increase in our descent’s speed made me doubt everything I had just done. We were crashing, and there seemed no possible way I could survive—no way any of us could survive it. At some point the screaming

stopped, and the plane's descent seemed to steepen even more, and I was *certain* I was going to die there.

I could feel the breeze flowing underneath the door, and the horrible sweeping feeling in my gut was back. My vision started to fade, and the sound of the wind flying by me slowly went away as the ocean below rose quickly up to meet the plane.

Ulysses, I thought about my kid. I thought about Miranda, I mean— what else was I going to do? No matter what had happened, no matter what she thought, she's still my daughter. I thought, as I went into freefall, that I was going to leave her behind, and that? That scared me more than any ritual nonsense ever could.

And so I used her memory as a parachute and prayed to any god that would listen.

I'm not sure when I passed out, but I did, whether from air loss or the speed at which I—*we* were barreling towards the ground I don't know, but I didn't remember anything for a while. A few fuzzy flashes of consciousness sure, but when I finally, *fully* came to, I was floating in the middle of the ocean, having been dragged out of the plane by another passenger.

ULYSSES
Christ, that's awful.

FRANK
Oh, he had nothing to do with it. We were stranded, just as lost to the Vast now as we had been before, but there were others alive. There were other people there with me, the fog yanked from their eyes, and they didn't want to die. Now, a group of people in the face of overwhelming fear who don't want to die is a very, *very* powerful thing, Ulysses.

ULYSSES
And you made it back?

FRANK
Somehow. There's cell service in the ocean, did you know that? Not everyone's phones had died, and the plane went down with enough flotation

devices for those of us who survived the initial crash. There weren't many, but enough.

Everything was rationed. Battery, water bottles, the scarce food left in backpacks. Those who could killed the birds that swooped towards our raft in curiosity and ate them raw. After three days a cargo ship picked us up. I don't remember much of that time, to be completely honest. I was working against hypothermia from the initial plunge and the moment we were able to flag the ship I was out again.

Twenty of us made it back. There were about two hundred on the plane. But if I hadn't crashed it, there wouldn't have been even one survivor. So I have to feel like I did the right thing.

ULYSSES
Statement ends?

FRANK
Statement ends.

ULYSSES
I'd say "I can't believe she'd do something like that," but… I think I passed that phase after reading about how she murdered her own husband.

FRANK
I'm getting out of the Foundation, Ulysses. Permanently. I never had the chance to officially quit, all things considered. I'm sure the Dark will have its way with me in the end, but it'll be on my terms, and that's worth something.

ULYSSES
You're just going to leave? I mean—I know Adriene's awful, but the Fears have always been part of the job, and there are good people in the Foundation, Frank—Morgan, Cass, Mars, even.

FRANK
Good individuals, yes, but the place is poison. I didn't notice until much, much too late, so by the time I was…. removed, shall we say, I was almost relieved. It happened slowly: first an extra demand from Adriene, then a late

night here or there, then another, and I was always much too happy to oblige. What was the point in saying no, right? I was doing the research I loved.

ULYSSES
Right.

FRANK
And then it just went on, and on, and on. The things I learned—the deaths, the Entities, they didn't seem so bad after some time. You've already got the itch for it, don't you?
[Beat, appraising.]
Yeah. For finding what shouldn't be known, and then deciding that no one else needs to know it.

ULYSSES
I don't— I'm not— I'm not hiding anything from anyone; I'm the *Curator,* that's my *job.*

FRANK
I know how you feel, kid, and I get it. I do. But there are consequences to the job, and they suck.

ULYSSES
Are you going to tell me what they are?

FRANK
I… I don't speak to my daughter anymore.

ULYSSES
What, *Miranda?* Are you serious?

FRANK
The Foundation swallowed me alive. She didn't even know who I was by the end. She gave a statement about me, did you know that? She came into my office and told me that her father disappeared.

ULYSSES
I'm… I'm so sorry, Frank, I had no idea.

FRANK
I'm not saying that the same will happen to you. But you need to know before you choose to go back. You need to know that whether you stay or leave, it's not going to be pretty. One way you just might end up free.

ULYSSES
If that's true, I can't let everyone fend for themselves in there.

FRANK
I had a feeling you'd say that. Here, do you have a pencil? Paper?

ULYSSES
I have… a phone.

FRANK
Absolutely useless. Fine, hand it over. There's two things I'm going to write down. Transfer them to paper as soon as you can and give it to the Mirrors.

[tapping]

I don't know exactly what will happen next, but once I've left the Foundation, I doubt I'll be the same. It'd be less of a sacrifice to the Dark if I knew what was coming, though, don't you think?

ULYSSES
Will you be able to help us? Afterwards?

FRANK
I have no idea. But there's more than enough from the past that the Mirrors are holding onto for me. Those files should help. Here—don't read that aloud.

ULYSSES
Okay. *[beat, reading]* Oh, *fuck.*

FRANK

You're not alone in this, Ulysses. That was my mistake. I thought I was, and it almost got me killed. The people in the Foundation that you're staying for? Don't cut them out. That's not an inspirational message, that's survival.

ULYSSES
Yeah. Okay. Thank you, Frank.

FRANK
I'm not *dying.* Don't look so upset.

[Another hug—desperate, a possible goodbye .]

ULYSSES
You'd better not. I put in all this time trying to figure out what happened to you in the first place.

FRANK
And now you know.

ULYSSES
More than I ever wanted to.

FRANK
Comes with the territory. Speaking of, let's not let the Eye get its way. I think the statement has given it all that it needs.

ULYSSES
[Noise of discontent] You're right. Okay. End recording.

[Tape recorder clicks off.]

[Theme plays.]

OUTRO

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